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AUTHOR Yildirim, Ali
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ABSTRACT

This study assessed Turkish elementary teachers' planning practices in terms of influences, problems, and effectiveness. Participants were 1,194 teachers from 210 schools. Teachers completed questionnaires that collected demographic data and explored their perceptions of instructional planning (types of plans, influences on these plans, effectiveness of the plans, problems faced during planning, and recommendations to improve planning practices). The main influences on unit plans and daily plans were teacher experience, the national curriculum, and textbooks. Colleagues and undergraduate education also influenced planning. Teaching experience influenced teachers' perceptions of the national curriculum and their unit and daily planning. Teachers assigned the most importance to student characteristics and availability of materials in daily planning and the least importance to evaluation procedures and writing objectives. Content coverage and teaching/learning activities were considered of medium importance. Planning problems included gaps between the national curriculum and classroom needs, a standard format for planning, lack of time and resources, lack of support from administrators, lack of cooperation among teachers, and designing lessons for diverse students. Teachers recommended a shorter format in unit and daily plans to make planning more manageable. They wanted more flexibility in adapting the national curriculum to students' needs. (Contains 10 references and 7 tables.) (SM)

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Ali Yıldırım
Middle East Technical University
Faculty of Education
Dept of Ed Sciences
06531 ANKARA - TURKEY
TEL: 90 (312) 210-4042
FAX: 90 (312) 210-1254
e-mail: a12268@tutor.fedu.metu.edu.tr

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Instructional Planning in a Centralized School System:

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to assess teachers' planning practices carried out at the primary school level in terms of influences, problems and effectiveness. Three research questions guided the data collection and analysis: (1) What are the major sources of contribution on primary school teachers' instructional planning? (2) What problems do teachers face during instructional planning? (3) What measures should be taken to improve the effectiveness of planning practices?

Instructional planning is an integral part of teaching process, and is considered to be one of the teacher's most complex and important tasks. All teachers engage in some kind of planning activity which is central to their teaching. Since teaching takes place in a complex, uncertain and rapidly changing context, teachers tend to construct plans as a basis of for decision making in the classroom (Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Planing itself requires a wide variety of decisions (Clark & Peterson, 1986). The nature of teaching necessitates continuous planning which starts before the teaching and learning process is created in the classroom and continues during this creation process.

Instructional planning is generally achieved through three types of plans: yearly plans, unit plans and daily and/or lesson plans. Yearly plans play a key role in making and recording long-term instructional decisions like curricular priorities and time allocations, integration and sequence of learning experiences, breadth and depth of inquiry, materials of instruction, and evaluation (Glatthorn, 1993). Unit plans are more specific than yearly plans and provide a mechanism for elaborating on units in terms of objectives, content, implementation and evaluation. Finally, lesson plans outline specific elements and processes

of a lesson. They are helpful in guiding teachers' and students' activities in the instructional process.

The literature presents many models of teacher planning. One of the earliest, and certainly most well known, is the rational planning model proposed by Tyler (1949). This model consists of four steps: (1) selecting objectives, (2) selecting learning experiences, (3) organizing learning experiences, and (4) evaluating the curriculum. Other models of teacher planning contrast with Tyler's in terms of when objectives are specified and to what specificity. For example, Yinger's model takes teacher planning as a three-stage problem solving task: (1) specification of initial activities based on an understanding of content, goals and experience in relation to each other, (2) elaboration of how the activity will be undertaken, and (3) activity implementation emphasizing "evaluation and routinization of the teacher's repertoire of knowledge and experience, which in turn plays a major role in future planning deliberations" (Clark & Yinger, 1979, p. 238). Another model proposed by Leinhardt (1983) views teacher planning as an implicit set of activity schemata or mental scripts for executing interactive teaching. Sometimes these mental scripts are so well rehearsed that teachers do not change many aspects of their teaching during their planning.

Research has shown that teachers' planning is influenced by a variety of factors. Instructional time, textbooks or curriculum guides, and student motivation appear to be the primary influences (McCutcheon, 1980; Leinhardt, 1983; Sardo-Brown, 1988). Specifying objectives does not seem to be the starting point for many teachers, a contrast to what Tyler proposed earlier. Furthermore, teachers are influenced in their planning by the administrative guidelines, standardized tests, student body, availability of materials and previous experience (Brophy, 1982; Bullough, 1987).

A principal limitation of research on teacher planning is that few studies have been done in different cultural contexts. Teachers may face both similar and different challenges in planning in different countries, and an assessment of these challenges may add to our understanding of teacher planning. In an attempt to bring a different perspective into teacher planning from a highly centralized system of education, this study aims to investigate teacher planning process at the primary school level in Turkey through the perspective of a large group of teachers selected from different regions in Turkey.

Turkish educational system is centralized in its many aspects like policy decisions, curriculum, approval of textbooks and other instructional materials, governance and inspection of schools, appointment and in-service training of teachers. Elementary education covers the first eight years of formal education. The first five years (primary level) are mainly taught by classroom teachers (generalists) while subject area teachers teach the last three years (middle level). The Ministry of National Education (MONE) governs all public preschools, elementary and secondary schools covering K-11 education throughout the country through the central bodies (like directorates and boards) and the local educational directorates. A uniform curriculum is carried out in all public and private schools. Instructional planning is largely influenced by the curriculum guides and the textbooks produced by the MONE. The MONE also has general guidelines for teachers to use in their instructional plans. Teacher planning is monitored by the school principal and the provincial inspectors in terms of its compliance with the standard curriculum and the norms of planning established within the individual school. Within this framework, teachers are required to plan their lessons through yearly, unit and daily plans. Despite the central and school level control on teacher planning, there seems to be room for teachers to plan a variety of sessions.

Method

The population of this study was 300,000 classroom teachers serving at primary schools in Turkey. The sampling plan was a stratified random sample generated by the Educational Research and Development Directorate of the MONE according to region, province, and school location (city, town and village) within the province. All seven regions in Turkey were represented in the study sample. Two provinces from each region, and 15 schools from each province were selected randomly. Of these 15, seven were selected from city schools, five from town and three from village schools. A total of 210 schools were involved in the study. All teachers in these schools were asked to participate in the study. As a result a total of 1194 teachers responded to the questionnaire.

Both male and female teachers were represented in the study sample almost equally (50.7% and 49.3% respectively). Different age groups were represented with varying percentages ranging from 10.4% to 34.1%. A little more than one-third (34.1%) were 41 or older while 13.3% were between 36 and 40, 18.2% were between 31 and 35, 24% were between 26 and 30, and finally 10.2% were 25 or younger. Half of the sample (49.7%) had 5 or fewer years of experience while close to one-fourth (23.5%) had 6 to 10, another one-fourth (24.1%) had 11 to 15, and only 2.7% had 16 or more years of teaching experience. Close to half of the teachers (46%) were not originally trained as classroom teachers. They were either trained to be a subject area teacher at the secondary level (e.g., history, literature, biology) or were the graduates of other programs whose aim were not to train teachers. Due to a serious teacher shortage at primary level in the 1990s, the Ministry of National Education (MONE) felt a need to hire the graduates of various university departments after they went through an alternative teacher certification program run either by the universities or the

MONE. In terms of school location, the sample represented city, town and village schools at somewhat similar percentages (34.5%, 28.9% and 37% respectively).

A questionnaire was designed to explore teachers' perceptions of their planning at the primary school level. The questionnaire included both open- and close-ended questions on the types of instructional plans, influences on these plans, their effectiveness and adequacy, problems faced during planning, and recommendations to improve planning practices. In addition, background questions like, age, gender, educational background, teaching experience, school location were also included.

The questionnaires developed were piloted with 30 teachers in elementary schools in Ankara. As result, certain revisions and additions were done to enhance the clarity of the questions and to cover additional relevant areas in relation to planning. The questionnaires were mailed to selected schools by the Educational Research and Development Directorate (ERDD) of the MONE with a letter inviting all teachers in the selected school to participate in the study. The completed questionnaires were mailed back to ERDD. There might be some teachers who did not complete the questionnaires in the selected schools, and this is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data collected through close-ended questions in the questionnaires. Main trends among teachers were explored through descriptive statistics like percentages and means. Group differences based on teaching experience and educational background were evaluated through t-test and one-way ANOVA for significance. Open-ended data in the questionnaires were subjected to descriptive analysis in which the responses were categorized according to the main themes identified. For this purpose a total of 20 questionnaires were randomly selected and the

responses to open-ended questions in these questionnaires were studied to determine the potential themes that could be used in coding the responses.

Results

Teachers' instructional planning involves yearly plans, unit plans and daily plans. Yearly plans are prepared by all teachers at the same grade level to provide consistency in terms of selection and organization of topics, amount of time spared for each unit, field trips, assessment, etc. The content outline in yearly plans is pretty much determined by the scope and sequence provided in the MONE curriculum guide. Unit and daily plans are prepared individually by each teacher. The MONE has a standard guideline for all teachers to use in preparing these plans outlining what the structure should be and what components should be included. Since this study focuses on individual teacher planning (i.e., unit and daily plans), the results are organized in two sections. The first section presents teachers' perceptions of unit plans in terms of influence, problems and recommendations for improving their effectiveness. The second section includes findings on lesson plans again in terms of influences, priorities, problems and recommendations.

Teachers' Perceptions of Unit Plans

In the questionnaire, teachers were first asked to indicate their perception of sources of contribution on their unit plans. As the results presented in Table 1 reveal, teachers' experience seems to make the strongest contribution on teachers' unit plans (Mean=4.44) whereas the principal's and inspectors' guidance appear to make the least contribution (Mean=1.85 and 2.03 respectively). Teachers also rated the national curriculum and course textbook(s) as making "considerable contribution" on their unit plans (Mean=4.05 and 3.50

respectively) while their rating for colleagues was a little more than "some contribution" (Mean=3.35) and for undergraduate education was less than "some contribution" (Mean=2.61). These results show that teachers mostly depend on their own experience, that is what really works, and then the national curriculum, that is what is required by the central body, in doing unit plans. One of the purposes of assessment of plans by the principals and inspectors is to assist the teachers in their planning practices. However, this assistance is not perceived as influential by the majority of the teachers. Since the textbooks are supposed to be in line with the national curriculum, it may be practical for teachers to use the textbook as a guide. It is interesting that undergraduate education does not much contribution in teachers' unit plans as expected. This might be due to a mismatch between what preservice teacher education covers and what teachers do in schools in relation to unit plans.

Table 1. Teachers' Perceptions of Sources of Contribution on Unit Plans

	No contribution (1)	Little contribution (2)	Some contribution (3)	Considerable contribution (4)	Strong contribution (5)	Mean	N
National curriculum	2	8.3	13.8	29.4	46.6	4.05	1112
Course textbook(s)	3.7	14.5	23.4	36	22.4	3.50	1101
Undergraduate educ.	18.2	24.2	22	18.1	17.4	2.61	1098
Teaching Experience	1.2	4.3	5.5	24.9	64.2	4.44	1119
Principal's guidance	23.1	40	24.2	9.6	3.1	1.85	1100
Inspectors' guidance	20.2	38	24.8	11.6	5.4	2.03	1105
Colleagues	3.9	17.5	26.6	33.1	18.9	3.35	1105

Numbers in the table indicate percentages. In addition, N's are based on the number of responses given for each individual item.

Analysis of variances through t-tests and one-way ANOVA was carried out in order to investigate the potential relations between two background factors (teaching experience and educational background) and teachers' perception of sources of contribution to preparing unit plans. When teaching experience was taken into consideration, teachers' perceptions of the

contribution of national curriculum, undergraduate education, teaching experience and guidance provided by inspectors to unit plans differed significantly at the level of .05. As Table 2 presents, the more experience the teachers had the higher level of rating they had for the contribution of the national curriculum, undergraduate education and teaching experience. On the other hand the more experience teachers had the lower rating they had for the contribution of inspectors' guidance in their unit plans. These results show that teachers with more experience seem to be influenced by the national curriculum, their educational background and teaching experience more than those with less experience as they prepare unit plans while inspectors' guidance seems more helpful for teachers with less teaching experience.

Table 2. Teachers' Perceptions of Sources of Contribution to Unit Plans by Experience

	5 years or less	6-10 years	11-15 years	16 or more years	f value	df	p
National curriculum	3.91	4.08	4.25	4.40	5.88	3	.001
Undergraduate education	2.30	2.45	3.19	4.24	26.88	3	.000
Teaching experience	4.17	4.68	4.67	4.97	28.41	3	.000
Inspectors' guidance	2.13	2.10	1.79	1.87	3.55	3	.014

Mean scores are based on a Likert scale where 1=no contribution and 5=strong contribution.

When educational background was taken into consideration, teachers' perceptions of the contribution of teaching experience and guidance provided by the principal on unit plans differed significantly at the level of .05. As Table 3 presents teachers who were trained as classroom teachers during their undergraduate education valued the contribution of their own experience to their unit plans more than their counterparts certified through alternative programs. These programs varied greatly in terms of their context, content and duration. Some of them were offered by the universities whereas others were run by the MONE. The

length changed from several weeks to 9 months, and the scope and the organization of the learning experiences changed in line with the sources and priorities of the institution offering the certification program. Principal's guidance was valued in terms of its contribution to preparing unit plans by teachers alternatively certified more than those who received classroom teaching education during their undergraduate studies. These results show that alternatively certified teachers depended on principal's help more than their counterparts whereas experience was more of a help for teachers who graduated from classroom teaching departments than for their counterparts.

Table 3. Teachers' Perceptions of Sources of Contribution on Unit Plans by Educational Background

	Graduates of Classroom Teaching Departments	Alternatively certified teachers	t value	df	p
Teaching experience	4.52	4.30	3.72	1100	.000
Principal's guidance	1.77	1.98	-2.38	1081	.017

Mean scores are based on a Likert scale where 1= no contribution and 5=strong contribution.

Through two open-ended questions in the questionnaire, teachers were asked to indicate the problems they faced most often in preparing unit plans and recommendations to solve these problems. A list of the common problems is presented below.

Gap between the national curriculum and the classroom needs (N=373)
Standard format for preparing unit plans (N=317)
    Writing behavioral objectives (N=148)
    Impractical length and detail (N=177)
Lack of resources (e.g., sourcebooks, learning materials, sample units) (N=293)
Lack of sufficient time (N=188)
Lack of guidance (N=52)
Lack of collaboration among colleagues (N=30)

As the list above displays, the most common problem mentioned by the teachers was the difficulty they experienced in bridging the requirements of the national curriculum with

the realities of the classroom. They stated that certain units in the national curriculum may not be in line with students' background, needs and interests, as a result, what they planned in units may not be achieved fully during instruction. Teachers mentioned that principals and inspectors often would like to see that unit plans reflected the national curriculum as much as possible resulting a dilemma for teachers in preparing unit plans. Some teachers resolved this dilemma by planning units on paper in line with the national curriculum but carry out instruction in line with students' needs and characteristics. In this case, planning activity was not useful in guiding instruction; it only becomes a written product to fulfill the expectations of the principal and the inspectors. In relation to this problem, many teachers (N=231) suggested that the MONE gave them more flexibility in adapting the national curriculum to the needs and characteristics of their own students.

Another area of problem was the standard format of the unit plan as required by the MONE and as inspected by the principal and the inspectors. Teachers complained that the length and the details required in the unit plans were simply not useful. Writing a long list of specific behavioral objectives for each unit was a common problem mentioned by a large group of teachers under this issue. Because of these reasons, according to teachers, writing unit plans became a time consuming activity to please the principal and the inspectors rather than being a guide for effective teaching. Many teachers (N=188) suggested unit plans should be shorter including several general objectives, less detailed content outline, an overview of teaching and learning activities and of evaluation activities. Others (N=84) suggested combining yearly and unit plans in a way that yearly plans could be prepared with more detail and unit plans would be simply eliminated. In this teachers thought they would have more time for daily planning as well as preparing teaching and learning activities and materials.

Lack of time for preparing unit plans was also mentioned as a major problem by a large group of teachers. This problem is related to the standard format which require teachers to include detailed behavioral objectives, content outline, concepts and materials, course activities, evaluation, etc. Some teachers recommended that teachers should be provided with time in school to prepare these plans and be entitled to some extra payment for the time they spent.

Lack of resources like textbooks, sample units, instructional materials was also mentioned as a problem by a group of teachers. In relation to this, lack of guidance and collaboration among colleagues were also mentioned as main problems by smaller groups of teachers. All these three problems point to teachers' need for help (both material or human) in doing unit plans.

To prepare more effective unit plans, a large number of teachers (N=231) highlighted the importance of taking students' background, needs and interests into consideration in planning. This recommendation is in line with one of the major problems faced by teachers as discussed above. Since the national curriculum highlights the general aspects of the courses which must be the same across all the schools in the country, one of the basic tasks of the instructional planner becomes making adjustment in the curriculum through the unit plans, so that students' needs and interests are met without jeopardising the basic tenets of the national curriculum. Many teachers (N=114) suggested that teachers should collaborate in preparing unit plans, so that they exchange ideas and resources, share strengths and deal with planning problems more effectively.

Other teachers (N= 76) recommended that unit plans should be prepared according to local needs through the expert commissions. This would ease the planning burden of the teachers as well as help them better meet the local needs in the classroom. On the other hand

some teachers (N=53) suggested that the MONE should prepare the unit plans so that teachers would have less planning burden and less problem in complying with the national curriculum. These teachers mentioned that teachers should just prepare yearly plans and daily plans.

Teachers' Perceptions of Daily Plans

Teachers' perceptions of sources of contribution on their daily plans (see Table 4) indicated that teachers' experience made the largest contribution on teachers' daily plans (Mean=4.52) whereas the principal's and inspectors' guidance made the smallest contribution (Mean=1.73 and 2.04 respectively). Teachers rated the course textbook(s) as the second largest sources of contribution and the national curriculum as the third (Mean=3.90 and 3.75 respectively). Colleagues and undergraduate education were rated as making "some contribution" (Mean=3.14 and 2.69 respectively). These results showed that the most important contribution in preparing daily plans was their own experience, which was consistent with the finding on unit plans. Teachers made use of course textbook(s) more than the national curriculum in preparing daily plans whereas the national curriculum made larger contribution than the textbook(s) in preparing unit plans. This finding indicated that teachers may depend on textbook(s) for short term or immediate planning whereas long term planning may depend more on the national curriculum. Another implication of this finding might be that teachers saw the textbook(s) as the national curriculum since they were supposed to be in line with the national curriculum. Principal's and inspectors' contributions were still the smallest in daily planning activities, implying that the guidance function of the administrators and inspectors for planning is not being achieved in schools to a sufficient degree. Undergraduate education had more contribution on daily plans than unit plans. This might be due to the fact that undergraduate education may pay more attention to short term planning.

Table 4. Teachers' Perceptions of Sources of Contribution on Daily Plans

	No contribution (1)	Little contribution (2)	Some contribution (3)	Considerable contribution (4)	Strong contribution (5)	Mean	N
National curriculum	4.8	11.4	17.7	25.5	40.6	3.75	1135
Course textbook(s)	2.2	8.3	17.5	36.3	35.8	3.90	1145
Undergraduate educ.	17.1	24.6	20.4	18.5	19.5	2.69	1130
Teaching experience	1.6	2.6	5.1	20.8	69.9	4.52	1148
Principal's guidance	26.4	39.2	23.1	8.1	3.1	1.73	1128
Inspectors' guidance	19.9	37.8	25.1	11.3	5.8	2.04	1129
Colleagues	6.4	20.4	27.1	28.9	17.1	3.14	1133

Numbers in the table indicate percentages. In addition, N's are based on the number of responses given for each individual item.

Analysis of variances through t-test and one-way ANOVA was carried out in order to investigate the potential relations between two background factors (teaching experience and educational background) and teachers' perception of sources of contribution to daily plans. Educational background did not appear to result in any significant difference among teachers in this respect. Teaching experience was influential on teachers' perception of the contribution of the national curriculum, undergraduate education, experience, inspectors' guidance. As Table 5 displays, the more experience the teachers had the higher level of rating they had for the contribution of the national curriculum, undergraduate education and teaching experience. On the other hand the more experience the teachers had the lower rating they had for the contribution of inspectors' guidance to their daily plans. These results showed that teachers with more experience seemed to be influenced by the national curriculum, their educational background and teaching experience more than those with less experience as they prepared daily plans, while inspectors' guidance was more helpful for teachers with less teaching experience. All these results are consistent with the results on teachers' perception of unit plans. This consistency seems to be logical since teachers are

supposed to prepare daily plans in line with their unit plans, therefore it is expected that the sources of influences are similar for both types of plans.

Table 5. Teachers' Perceptions of Sources of Contribution on Lesson Plans by Experience

	5 years or less	6-10 years	11-15 years	16 or more years	f value	df	p
National curriculum	3.57	3.78	4.05	4.17	8.46	3	.000
Undergraduate education	2.44	2.45	3.27	4.00	64.73	3	.000
Teaching experience	4.34	4.67	4.71	4.71	11.70	3	.000
Inspectors' guidance	2.12	2.14	1.84	1.57	7.96	3	.014

Mean scores are based on a Likert scale where 1= no contribution and 5=strong contribution.

Teachers were also asked to rate the importance they assigned to the basic components of daily plans (see Table 6). The results indicated that student characteristics and availability of learning materials were assigned the highest level of importance (Mean=4.34 and 4.10 respectively) while evaluation procedures and writing objectives were assigned the lowest level of importance (Mean 2.70 and 2.93 respectively). Content coverage and teaching/learning activities were assigned a medium level of importance (Mean 3.27 and 3.20 respectively). These results revealed that teachers' primary objective in daily plans was to design instruction according to students' needs and interests taking into consideration the teaching and learning materials available to them. Open-ended responses indicated that teachers had the flexibility to align the content and the activities according to students' background without jeopardising the general scope and sequence provided in the national curriculum. Writing behavioral objectives was a common complaint among teachers as reflected in their open-ended responses. Many did not find it useful, and this might be the reason why they assigned a lower level of significance to it in preparing daily plans.

Table 6. Teachers' Perceptions of Priorities in Daily Plans

	Not important (1)	Of little importance (2)	Somewhat important (3)	Important (4)	Very important (5)	Mean	N
Objectives	13	22.8	21.9	21.4	20.9	2.93	1119
Content coverage	7.1	18.8	22.5	27.6	24	3.27	1123
Teaching and learning activities	8.8	19.3	23.2	22.3	26.4	3.20	1128
Evaluation procedures	9.5	30.2	30.3	17.9	12.1	2.70	1114
Learning materials	2.3	6.5	8.3	39	43.7	4.10	1127
Student characteristics	3.4	2.4	6.6	30.3	57.3	4.34	1125

Numbers in the table indicate percentages. In addition, N's are based on the number of responses given for each individual item.

Analysis of variances through t-test and one-way ANOVA was carried out in order to investigate the potential relations between two background factors (teaching experience and educational background) and teachers' perception of priorities in daily plans. Educational background did not appear to result in any significant difference among teachers in this respect. Teaching experience was influential on teachers' perceptions of the importance of content coverage, and teaching and learning activities. As Table 7 displays, the more experience the teachers had the higher level of priority they assigned to content coverage, and teaching and learning activities in preparing daily plans.

Table 7. Teachers' Perceptions of Priorities in Daily Plans by Experience

	5 years or less	6-10 years	11-15 years	16 or more years	f value	df	p
Content coverage	3.11	3.37	3.51	3.53	5.17	3	.001
Teaching and learning activities	3.06	3.23	3.42	3.39	3.44	3	.016

Mean scores are based on a Likert scale where 1=not important and 5=very important.

Teachers were asked to indicate the problems they faced most often in preparing daily plans and recommendations to solve these problems through two open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The major problems they mentioned are listed below.

Lack of resources (e.g., sourcebooks, learning materials, sample plans) (N=342)
Standard and detailed format (N=332)
    Writing behavioral objectives (N=81)
    Outlining content in detail (N=30)
    Specifying evaluation procedures (N=29)
Lack of sufficient time (N=237)
Gap between plans and the classroom realities (N=157)
    gap between the curriculum and the students' background (N=31)
    gap between the curriculum and the school environment (N=12)
Students with varying characteristics (N=85)
Lack of sufficient guidance (N=44)

As the list revealed, lack of resources seemed to be the major concern among teachers. Teachers stated that they would need sample plans, sourcebooks, audio-visual learning materials. Daily plan format required by the MONE also appears to be a major concern for teachers since it requires writing behavioral objectives, detailed content outline and specific evaluation procedures. Many teachers did not find behavioral objectives useful in planning and saw writing them in great numbers would be waste of time. They suggested writing more general objectives in daily plans instead of specific ones.

Lack of sufficient time was a problem since teachers were required to write daily plans every day in a detailed format. Since there were many courses in a day to be planned (e.g., life studies, mathematics, Turkish, music), most teachers had to spend time at home for planning. In addition, teachers said that they could not use the previous year's plans by regulations, and they had to write them again even if they made no changes.

The gap between the national curriculum and the classroom realities was reported to be a problem in preparing daily plans as well. Teachers reported the difficulties they experienced in implementing the same curriculum without considering the characteristics of the student group and the environmental conditions. A related problem was related to addressing the varying characteristics of students in plans. Since students with different backgrounds and characteristics would require different treatment of the curriculum, teachers

found it difficult to address in daily plans. Teachers said they needed more flexibility in designing daily plans in line with their own classroom context. Finally teachers complained about lack of sufficient guidance in doing daily plans. They expected more help from the administrators and the inspectors as well as from the inservice education seminars organized by the MONE centrally.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the main sources of influence on unit plans teachers prepare seem to be teachers' experience, the national curriculum and the course textbook(s). Colleagues and undergraduate education appear to have a medium level of impact on unit plans whereas principals' and inspectors' guidance make the lowest level of contribution on unit plans. Similar results apply to preparation of daily plans as well. Among the background factors, teaching experience makes a difference on teachers' perception of the national curriculum, their educational background and teaching experience as influences on unit and daily plans. Teachers with more experience tend to perceive more contribution from these sources in their unit and daily planning activities. On the other hand inspectors' guidance is perceived as more helpful in planning by teachers with less teaching experience than those who are experienced. The results indicate no difference among teachers with different educational backgrounds in terms of their perceptions of sources of contribution to daily plans. However, teachers who were trained as classroom teachers during their undergraduate education valued the contribution of their own experience to their unit plans more than their counterparts certified through alternative programs whereas alternatively certified teachers tend to rate the contribution to principals to unit plans at a higher level than their counterparts.

All these results imply that experience is the key to the planning and the national curriculum and the course textbook(s) are the critical elements taken into consideration while planning instruction. Surprisingly undergraduate education does not seem to be as influential in planning decisions teachers make. In addition, teachers do not highlight the colleagues' contribution very much and this might be due to a low level collaboration among teachers in planning. Although the principals and inspectors are supposed to be making a good deal of contribution to teachers' plans, that is not the case in practice. Less experienced teachers and alternatively certified teachers seem to be influenced by their guidance to a greater degree than their counterparts who are more experienced or certified through traditional teacher training programs.

Teachers assign the highest level of importance to student characteristics and availability of learning materials in daily planning while they assign the lowest level of importance to evaluation procedures and writing objectives. Content coverage and teaching/learning activities were assigned a medium level of importance. Teachers' primary objective in daily plans seems to be designing instruction according to students' needs and interests taking into consideration the learning materials available to them. In addition, as teachers become more experienced in teaching they seem to assign higher level of priority to content coverage, and teaching and learning activities in preparing daily plans. Consistent with the previous research teachers' main concern in day-to-day planning is the content they are going to cover and the related teaching and learning activities. They are more concerned with what to teach and how to teach than what objectives for the lesson to write and how to evaluate student learning.

Teachers report various problems in their planning activities. Gap between the national curriculum and the classroom needs, a standard format for preparing plans (e.g., the

requirement for writing specific behavioral objectives), lack of sufficient time and resources, lack of sufficient support from principals and inspectors, lack of cooperation among teachers, and designing lessons according to students with varying characteristics are the ones most frequently cited as problems by teachers. Many teachers report variance between what they plan and what actually happens in their classrooms. This difference is attributed to the fact that what they are required to write in their plans may be quite different from what the classroom process demands. Teachers recommend a shorter format in unit and daily plans so that they find planning more manageable in terms of time and effort. Lengthy plans are not perceived as effective since they would include many formal details (e.g., specific objectives) that are not so useful during implementation anyway. They also would like to have more flexibility in adapting the national curriculum to students' needs and interests through planning. They expect more help from the principal and the inspectors and be provided with more resources (e.g., sourcebooks, learning materials, sample plans) to use for planning.

Studying teachers' planning is important from several perspective. First, there has been a common dissatisfaction with instructional planning among teachers as well as principals and inspectors. This study uncovers some of the areas of problems in teachers' planning. Second, this study indicates that planning should not be separate from instruction, and when there is difference between plans and instruction, teachers see planning activities as waste of time. Finally, this study shows the importance of receiving feedback from teachers, those who experience together with the students the outcomes of planning, and taking into account their perspective in thinking about alternative models and approaches for instructional planning.

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